United Nations S/2016/211

Security Council

Distr.: General
4 March 2016

Original: English

Letter dated 4 March 2016 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council

The present letter is submitted pursuant to paragraph 3 of Security Council resolution 2261 (2016), in which the Council requested me to initiate preparations related to the establishment of a political mission in Colombia, including on the ground. I was also requested to present detailed recommendations, for the consideration and approval of the Council, regarding the mandate, size and operational aspects of the mission as soon as possible and then within 30 days of the signature of the ceasefire agreement between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — People's Army (FARC-EP). The information contained herein is based on the activities that the United Nations Secretariat has undertaken to prepare for the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Colombia. Further details about the precise mandate and activities of the Mission will be presented once the parties, which continue their negotiations in Havana, reach an agreement and define the parameters of the laying down of arms, as well as the definitive bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.

1. Preparations

In keeping with the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, the United Nations Secretariat ensured that strategic analysis and planning were initiated promptly. Accordingly, I issued an internal planning directive providing my guidance on expected outcomes; parameters for planning purposes; definition of internal responsibilities; and coordination and reporting within the United Nations system. In the directive, I indicated that the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs was the Secretariat lead for the process and that, as soon as appointed, my Special Representative would be responsible for leading the planning and preparations for the United Nations Mission in Colombia, reporting through the Department of Political Affairs. In addition, relevant departments and offices of the United Nations Secretariat would constitute a United Nations Headquarters planning team, led by the Department of Political Affairs. The team would ensure that timely administrative, budgetary and other support arrangements were in place for the deployment of the Mission.

In accordance with Security Council resolution 2261 (2016), the United Nations Mission in Colombia will participate in and coordinate a tripartite monitoring and verification mechanism that will oversee the definitive bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. In addition to the United Nations, the

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mechanism shall include representatives of the Government of Colombia and of FARC-EP. The Mission will also be responsible for monitoring and verifying the laying down of arms. In order to ensure that the United Nations is in a position to undertake those roles and to begin monitoring operations within a reasonable time frame following the signing of a final peace agreement, the Secretariat has already undertaken a number of activities.

An initial fact-finding team conducted a visit to Bogota from 3 to 6 February 2016. The team engaged extensively with the United Nations country team, gained an understanding of the capabilities of the agencies, funds and programmes within the country team and identified opportunities for country team support to the establishment of the Mission in a number of administrative, financial and other areas. Such cooperation would minimize the cost and time required for the start-up of the Mission.

The Secretariat has also initiated negotiations with the Government on a status-of-mission agreement. Pending the finalization and entry into force of that agreement, an exchange of letters has been concluded, which puts in place interim arrangements regarding the activities of the Mission, including its advance team.

On operational issues, planning provides for a three-phased approach to the set-up of the Mission, in close cooperation with the other two parties to the monitoring and verification mechanism. Phase 1 began with the establishment of an interdepartmental planning team at Headquarters on 10 February 2016. On 24 February 2016, a small advance team was deployed to Bogota to establish the Mission headquarters and to support planning. The advance team will also assess conditions at the eight locations identified by the parties for the establishment of the mechanism's regional headquarters. Once adequate information has been gathered and analysis undertaken of each location, the Mission will start to deploy core teams to those locations in coordination with the two parties. The regional headquarters will serve as bases from which observers will deploy to local offices (in phases 2 and 3), where monitoring and verification activities will be carried out once the ceasefire enters into force and the substantive work of the Mission begins. Accordingly, it is of paramount importance that the regional headquarters be staffed and equipped on time.

The advance team will not engage in the substantive activities of the Mission. Consistent with Security Council resolution 2261 (2016), all monitoring and verification activities will commence following the signing of the final agreement. Phase 1 of mission start-up will conclude with the gradual transfer of administrative, financial and support functions to the Mission headquarters, once Secretariat systems and processes are in place.

Phase 2 of mission planning will consist of getting the Mission ready to operate at the local level along with representatives of the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP. The exact number, size and location of the areas where the ceasefire and laying down of arms will take place are still under negotiation between the parties in Havana. Consequently, detailed planning assumptions and requirements for monitoring and verification will need to be determined in the coming weeks, in tandem with decisions taken by the parties. Phase 3 will consist of the deployment of all United Nations observers and the full operationalization of the tripartite monitoring and verification mechanism. Such deployment can take place only after the parties have signed a final peace agreement.

The two parties are committed to the acceleration of the peace talks in Havana, including on the achievement of an agreement on the ceasefire, cessation of hostilities and laying down of arms. My delegate to the peace talks, Jean Arnault, will continue to engage with the negotiating parties, in particular to help to apply United Nations best practices with regard to international monitoring and verification. Close cooperation with the parties and close coordination with the talks in Havana, the work of the advance team of the Mission in Bogota and the United Nations Headquarters planning team will remain essential to enable the Mission to start operations in a timely manner.

The proposed initial activities in phase 1 will be funded by my unforeseen and extraordinary expenses account relating to the maintenance of peace and security. In addition, a request for commitment authority is in the process of being submitted to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, to cover the remaining needs of phase 1. Wherever possible, the Mission will take advantage of opportunities offered by existing United Nations assets and government-provided infrastructure with a view to minimizing the requirements for extensive investment in facilities and equipment. The cost implications for phases 2 and 3 will be considered in a full submission to the General Assembly in due course. In the coming days I shall communicate with the Council on the appointment of my Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Mission in Colombia.

2. Engagement with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States

In keeping with the parties' request, States members of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) are expected to contribute observers to the Mission. On 27 January 2016, at the Fourth CELAC Summit, held in Quito, the Heads of State of CELAC adopted a special declaration expressing readiness to contribute to the United Nations Mission in Colombia.

On 8 February 2016, the Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations convened a meeting of representatives of CELAC member States. The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, and my delegate to the Colombia peace talks, Mr. Arnault, briefed participants. The goal of the meeting was to start a dialogue about the future contributions of CELAC member States to the Mission. My delegate provided an update on recent activities related to his engagement with the parties in Havana, particularly the Subcommission on end-of-conflict issues within the Colombian peace process, and shared the envisaged planning activities for the Mission. The Department of Political Affairs has continued to engage with CELAC member States to continue planning for their contributions.

3. Conclusion

In the present letter, I have reported on the implementation to date of resolution 2261 (2016), including the activities conducted and envisaged for the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Colombia. Once the parties reach a final peace agreement and define the parameters of the laying down of arms, as well as the definitive bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, a detailed proposal will be submitted to the Council.

In closing, I should like to extend my sincere gratitude to my delegate, Mr. Arnault, who has been advising representatives of the Government of Colombia and of FARC-EP in Havana as they define the parameters for the ceasefire, cessation of hostilities and laying down of arms. Mr. Arnault has likewise adeptly led the Headquarters-based planning process and overseen the deployment of the advance team of the Mission to Bogota. I am confident that, with planning continuing apace, the Organization will be ready to assume the tasks entrusted by the parties in a timely fashion.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon